

American Indian Legends

The Origin of Stones

A LONG time ago there were no stones on the earth. The mountains, hills and valleys were not rough and it was easy to walk on the ground swiftly. There were no small trees at that time. All the bushes and trees were tall and straight and were equal distances apart, so that man could travel through without having to make a path for himself.

There was a large buffalo who roamed over this land. He had power to change anything into different forms. He got this power from the water. This power would be his as long as he drank water only at a certain place. There was a large mountain over which the buffalo used to roam. The buffalo liked this mountain so one day he asked if it would like to be something else besides a mountain. The mountain said it would like to be turned into something that no one would want to climb over. The buffalo said, "I will change you into a hard mountain which I will call a stone. You will be so hard that no one will want to break you and your sides will be so smooth that no one will want to climb you."

So the mountain was changed into a large stone. The buffalo told the stone that it could change itself into anything so long as it remained unbroken.

In this part of the land there were no men; only buffaloes lived here. The buffaloes knew that there were men on the other side of the mountain who were cruel and killed animals, so they kept as far away from them as possible. But one day the buffalo thought he would go on the other side of the mountain and see the men. He wanted to make friends with him so that he would not kill the buffaloes. He went over the mountain and soon came to a wigwam by a stream of water, in the wigwam lived an old woman and her grandson. When the little boy saw the buffalo he was very glad and told his grandmother to be good to him. The buffalo was pleased with the old woman and her grandson, so he told them he would change them into anything they would like to be. The boy said he did not want to be changed into anything, but he wanted to become a swift runner. The grandmother said she wanted to be changed into something so that she could be with her son wherever he went. The buffalo said he would take the woman and boy to the

home of the buffalo. He would ask the buffaloes to teach the boy to become a swift runner, and he would ask the water to change the old woman into something which would enable her to be with her grandson always.

So the buffalo, the old woman, and the boy went over the mountain to the land of the buffaloes. They said they would teach the boy to run swiftly if he would keep his people from hunting and killing them. He promised that he would do so and the buffaloes taught him how to run so swiftly that no one of them could keep up with him. The water changed the old woman into wind, so she could follow her boy wherever he went.

The boy stayed with the buffaloes till he grew to be a man and then he was permitted to go back to his own people. The boy was made the leader of the hunters because he was such a swift runner. One day the chief told him to go hunt buffaloes. The tribe had never succeeded in killing buffaloes, because they could not keep up with them, they ran so swiftly. The chief told the boy that if he succeeded in getting some buffaloes he would adopt him as his son and make him chief in his place when he died. The boy's great ambition was to become a chief so he determined to get the buffaloes.

He started out with his followers and climbed the mountain so swiftly that he left his companions far behind. When the buffaloes saw the hunters they were frightened and began to run, but the boy kept up with them and killed most of them.

Now it happened that the great buffalo who got his power from the water was away, and while returning he became so thirsty that he drank of some water on the other side of the mountain. When he came back and saw what the hunters had done he became very angry and tried to turn them into grass so he could eat them, but he had lost his power because of the other water. He went to the stone and asked him what he could do to punish the man for what he had done. The stone said: "I will ask the trees to entangle themselves together so that it will be difficult for man to travel through them. Then I will break myself into many pieces and scatter myself all over the land so that the swift runner and his followers can not run over me without hurting their feet."

So the stone broke itself into many pieces and scattered itself all over the land, so that when the swift runner and his

followers tried to run over the mountain the stone cut their feet and the bushes scratched and bruised their bodies. This is the Indian's story of how there came to be so many stones all over the earth.

The Fox and the Lobster

ONCE there was a lobster on the river bank sunning himself, when suddenly a fox came along. The fox said to the lobster: "You think you are big because you have a pair of pinchers, but I can outrun you." It happened to be just one mile to the road. The lobster said, "I will give you your length start of me."

So the fox started off. As he did so the lobster caught hold of his tail and held tight until they reached the road, when the fox turned around. As he did not see the lobster he began to laugh, but then the lobster said "What are you laughing about? I have been here waiting for you a long time." The fox saw that he was beaten, so he went on very sad for letting the lobster fool him so badly.

How Loneliness Created Prairie Dogs

MANY, many summers ago before the white men came there used to be a good man; the people did not know where he came from. He was always hunting and fishing, and liked to be alone.

One day when he was a long ways from home, a little bear started out of the brush in front of him. He chased the bear for a long time, finally it ran into a cave by a spring. The man whose name was Loneliness followed it, but just as he passed the spring a huge monster caught him and pulled him into the spring. He stayed there a long time. After the people had mourned him as dead, and had forgotten him, he came into camp and told them what had happened to him. The people only laughed at him and called him a liar, and said they: "You are telling too much to believe." After they had done him this way, he told them he would pay them back sometime, not with wickedness but goodness.

He then went away and was not seen again. He went in the monster's control and so he had to go back to the spring and go and study magic.

Many summers afterwards a great famine came. There was nothing to eat. The Indians began to die off and fade for the want of food.

This man saw this and he wondered how he could save the people he loved. He thought he would ask the monster, who was a magician, if he would help him. He at last made up his mind that he would steal the magician's rolls of bark and find out how his friends could be saved.

At night, when the magician was asleep, the Indian crept out of his lodge and into the magician's camp. When he got there he took some roots and laid them across the magician's mouth which would make it impossible for him to wake up.

The Indian then got the rolls of bark and began to study. At last he found out that the magician had planned out all this and that it was he whom he had to outwit in saving his friends. He looked closer and found in the corner of a small piece of bark some writing which said: "In my belt there is an arrow which when you shoot it into the air will bring a lot of little animals." The Indian then laid some more roots over the magician's mouth and then took off his belt. He found a little arrow about a foot long. He seized this and ran out into the world.

He shot this arrow a good many times, then broke it in little pieces so that another spell could not be laid over him.

He then killed plenty of the little animals which he called the prairie dogs, because they sounded like real dogs. He took the dogs to the dying Indians and saved them. After the Indian men had got stronger, he took them to the place where the prairie dogs were and showed them how to kill them and keep them from going into the holes in the ground.

So the men killed plenty for there were many of them. When they got home the man, Loneliness, told them his history. The Indians all were glad and begged forgiveness for the wickedness they had done him.

So the Indians now have prairie dogs to eat and are not in much danger of starving. The Indians still remember that Loneliness created the prairie dogs.

Ni-ni-bo-sho

ONCE when Ni-ni-bo-sho was roaming in the woods he met a deer who had a bow and arrow. Said Ni-ni-bo-sho, "Let me see your fine bow and arrow." The deer hesitated at first, but finally let Ni-ni-bo-sho take the bow and arrow. After looking at them for a few minutes he asked the deer where was the softest part in his head. "My forehead of course," said the deer. In another instant the deer lay at Ni-ni-bo-sho's feet.

Ni-ni-bo-sho built a fire and cooked his deer. When he began to eat, a tree nearby screamed so loud that Ni-ni-bo-sho got so angry that he told the tree to keep still while he ate. But the tree kept it up and finally Ni-ni-bo-sho got up to hit the tree, but the tree held his hand fast to the bough the moment he laid it there. While he was hanging on the bough some hungry wolves ran close by and Ni-ni-bo-sho shouted to them and said, "My brothers, don't go that way," while pointing towards where the deer lay.

When the tree had given some advice to Ni-ni-bo-sho he let him go but told him to be careful lest he should fall into trouble again.

When Ni-ni-bo-sho returned he found his meat all gone (his brothers had eaten it all up). Only a few bones lay here and there. Looking on he soon found the head, but that as well as the bones could not be eaten. After much trouble he found that the wolves had not eaten the brain, but how he was to get it he knew not. When he thought it over he changed himself into a snake and crawled through a hole into the head. But when he tried to come out he found that he had grown larger while he was eating.

What was he to do? He called aloud for help but none came.

By and by he raised himself up and found that the head was very light. So he ran and ran and after a while he ran against a tree. "Who are you?" asked Ni-ni-bo-sho. "I am Pine," said the tree, "and grow in the thick woods." About five minutes later he ran against another tree. "Who are you?" asked he again. "I am Ash," the tree said "and grow near the water." A-ha! thought Ni-ni-bo-sho. "I'm near water," and no sooner had he said it then he felt himself swinging in the air and was soon getting wet. He had fallen from a high and steep cliff and so he could not get on dry land again. On and on he swam.

Some Indians were out hunting when they saw something that looked more like a deer than anything else. "Deer! Deer!" they all shouted and towards the deer they steered their birch-bark canoes.

On and on swam Ni-ni-bo-sho and so hard was he swimming that when he swam against a rock the head he was in broke and fell to pieces. Ni-ni-bo-sho changed himself back into his own form and laughed at the Indians for their blindness.

"Let's go back," said they, "it was only Ni-ni-bo-sho."

The Fox and the Bear

THE two chiefs, the fox and the bear, were camping together with their companies. Each had a company under his rule.

They were having good times while camping together; after a while the food began to get scarce. They couldn't kill any game because they were animals themselves. They lived on roots and fruits. Fox was a wise chief and the bear was lazy and didn't do any work; just made announcements to his company telling them to look for food. Fox had three wives. They were different races or tribes. One of them was a duck, another was a frog, and the one he loved best was a cricket and had a beautiful voice. Chief Bear had but one wife and he had two children, or daughters. One early morning Chief Fox went out hunting for food but he couldn't find anything.

One day Chief Bear made an announcement to all the different kinds of animals. He said this: "Tomorrow morning I want you young fellows to go hunting for deer. The first fellow who brings me a deer can have my daughters for his wives." Chief Fox heard this. In the evening he went out hunting for deer for the next morning so he could just come and be the first fellow to bring a deer to the chief. He killed one and put it in a certain place. When the next morning came he was anxious. He went right straight to the place where he had that deer. When he came to this place he could not find it for a long time, until sunrise, then he found it. He took it home, then went right to the chief's place. He passed his place. He wouldn't notice his three wives. When he came to the chief's someone had brought a deer already, and he took his back to his wives. So they say "Cheating won't work."

A Blackfoot Indian Story

ONCE upon a time an old man was walking along a river. It was very hot and all he had was a buffalo robe. So he said he didn't need this buffalo blanket any more because it was too hot to wear and too heavy to carry. So he gave it to a big rock. He covered the rock with this buffalo robe and went away. By and by he saw the clouds getting black and that it was going to rain. All that he had for a friend was a fox. He told this fox: "Run over and get my blanket. It is on that big rock where we were going along the river." So the fox ran over and told the rock that he came

after the blanket. "Who wants the blanket?" said the rock. The fox said, "The old man." The rock told the fox, "Anything that was given me shall not be taken back again."

The fox told the old man what the rock said. The old man got mad and said: "I need that robe; it is going to rain; the rock doesn't need any blanket." So he went and got it. After he got about two miles he heard a curious noise and looked back. He saw the rock rolling after him. He ran up a high hill. The rock went up the hill. Then he ran down and the rock came down after him. He told the fox to run in a hole and the fox did. Then the old man saw a big hole just his size and he crawled in and the big rock came and blocked the hole. The old man stayed in the hole for three days till the fox dug a hole big enough for the old man to crawl out through. So he was safe at last, then he went up the river. As he came near the stream he saw in the water some red berries. He was hungry; he had to have some; so he began to dive for the berries, but did not succeed in getting any, so he said: "I have to have some." He went and got some rocks and cut strings from the robe, tied the rocks to his neck, legs, and arms and plunged into the water. After a long time he tried to come to the surface but the rocks kept him down. He struggled along till he came to the top. His stomach was full of water. He felt pretty sick; he lay down on his back and looked in the trees and saw the berries on the boughs overhead. The berries were over the water. He said to himself: "I was diving after the shadow of the berries and I am nearly dead."

How a Boy Got to the Land of Spirits

AN OLD man once lived in a hut with his little son. Every day his son would go out hunting. One day his son went to sleep by the river and he had a very nice long dream about how he became a chief and a good hunter. So he went again the next morning and went towards the east where he met a big snake. The snake told him if he would get him some kind of animal to eat he would let him pass through the water which was very deep. So the boy ran and killed a bird and gave it to the snake who said he could pass. He went on and on until he came to a little tent by the river. He was very tired and hungry. He went in and made himself at home. He stayed there all day and waited till someone

might come. Nobody came and he thought he would stay there all night, so he did.

The next morning he had his breakfast and thought he would leave. As he was walking along the road he heard some one calling him by his name. He stopped to see who it was. He saw no one so he took a few steps, then he heard the same word again.

He came back home again and told his father all about what he did and what he had seen. His father told him that he had been in the land of the spirits and told him to go again and see if he could find his mother there.

He went to try his luck again; he went in the same road which he went before. He heard singing and dancing and he thought he would sit down and listen to them. He heard some one calling him; he looked around and saw his mother standing beside him. She took him and showed him all the things around there. When he went back he told his father that he had seen his mother in the land of spirits. So the Indians say to their children and the men and women not to be afraid when they are dying because they will be happy when they get to the land of the spirits.

This is told by one of the old Indians and now the old Indians are nearly all gone. Maybe they are now in the land of the spirits.

The Seven Hunters

THERE is a story told about seven Indian hunters when our ancestors lived in the State of Indiana. Every winter they used to go down the Mississippi River and down to the Southern States.

There were seven Indian hunters who loaded a canoe with bows, arrows, flour, clothing, tents, axes, and such things as they might need for the four or five months that they were to be gone.

They got in their canoes and paddled for the Southern States.

When they got to the place where they were going they pitched their tents on a rise of ground. One or two men were cooks at the camps for a week or two. Then other two men took their places while the others hunted. The men that were hunting were supposed to kill all the game, skin it and dry all the meat, which was cut into long strips.

One day the hunters went out to hunt again. They

saw a large turtle by the lake. They thought they would have a little ride, so all got on the turtle's back. Their feet stuck to the turtle so that when they tried to pull loose they could not. The turtle crawled into the water and the men were drowned.

In the evening the cook had their supper prepared, but the hunters did not come. The cooks thought maybe their game was too heavy to carry, so they waited for two or three days and yet the hunters did not return. The cooks took a canoe and sailed back to their homes and told the people that the men were missing.

There was an old man who had power over the water and when they told him he said he would find out. They took a canoe and went to the southern land where they had camped. The old man went to the water's edge and called up a fish. He cut a piece of its flesh off and burnt it. He put the fish back into the water and said to it, "You are not the one that killed the hunters." Then he called up the eel and cut a piece off its flesh. He burned it and said, "You did not kill the hunters," so he let it go. He called the snake. He heard the waters roar and saw a large snake coming. He cut a piece of flesh off and burned it, and said, "You can go, you are not the one." Then he called up the turtle, which was guilty. It would not have come but it had to as the man had power over the waters. So he cut a piece of its flesh and burned it. He said, "You are the one that killed the hunters." Then he burned the turtle up and saved all the ashes from the animals he had burned.

Then they sailed back to their homes. When they got back the people were very glad to see them. He called a meeting of the people and put the ashes in small bags and gave a bag to each person. Before he gave the bags to them he told them they could be whatever they wanted to be. Some said they wanted to be rich. Some said they wanted to be good-looking. Some said they wanted to be brave warriors. One man said he wanted to rest.

After he had given all the bags away they went home. They became what they wanted to be. This man that wanted to rest went to the camp and rested. The people soon became tired of him, so about two years after planned to take him to an island and leave him there. One man went after him; he came, and these men told him they were going out camping and wanted him to go along.

When these men got to the island they went out hunting, but this lazy man stayed and slept all the time. The other two men got in their canoe and left him. When he awoke he saw nobody. Then a strange person appeared to him and told him that these men had left him and said: "Tomorrow I will come after you in my own form. You must not be scared."

The next day this lazy man heard the waters roar. He went to the water and saw a large snake coming with horns like the largest trees. He said to the lazy man, "Get on the highest tops of my horns and I will take you home. You will become smart and you can kill any game you wish." He got on and the snake took him home. When he got home the people were very surprised to see him. He became the greatest hunter and warrior of his tribe. The people liked him after that. Finally he became the chief of the tribe.

Why We Have Cyclones

ONCE there were some Indians who wanted something to cool them off, so they discussed what to do. Finally the Indians began to come together and they camped in a place where they could have more room. One day an old Indian said: "I will tell you what we can do. Keep close to me and watch me what I will do. Go, some one, and get me some red mud from the river." Some women went and got some red mud from the river. "Everybody look now and see what I am doing. First is the red mud I have in my hand. We will make it in a shape like this," and he made a very ugly animal, the head first, then put on four legs and a long tail. Now watch and see what I made. I will blow and after that all of you people blow. Now, look, everybody. Use your muscles when I say 'Be big now' and do what you can do." Then the old man said: "Red mud show us, please what you can do on this earth. We are so hot and smothered. Now, go."

Up and down in the air he flew like a bird. People began to cry and everybody was running about. They said: "Please, good cyclone, stay! Stop on the earth."

He flew like a wild, fierce horse. He jumped up and down over again and said "Ah-ha! old man, see what you have done." "See what you have done; you let the ugly thing go." said those on earth. So the old man called the ugly thing and

said: "People are crying and you tear down trees, you blow too much. Please come to me. I will make you over again." So the ugly thing came down and the clouds became as black as a crow.

"It is too windy on this earth," again cry the people. "You are ugly; you are crazy and wild. We will make you better than this," said the old man. So he made the clay in the shape of a wild horse, then said: "Now, cyclone, again you go and let us see you." He went up in the air. "Now we can be cool hereafter," said the old Indian.

The people still crying called out: "Please, please, cyclone, you can go now and do not come again; stay up in the sky."

"All right," said the cyclone. "I'll do what you tell me." So up he flew. That is the reason we see in the clouds the head of a horse with a tail like a snake. To this day you will see him in the sky just the way they made him. When the Indians see him coming they run out and cry: "Please jump over us and don't blow us away with your breath." So to this day Indians are not afraid of cyclones like the white people.

The Ant and the Bear

ONCE upon a time the ant and the bear had a quarrel. The bear said he wished it would be night and day for six months every year. He wished this because he stays in his house all winter, they say, and comes out in summer. The ant said she wished it would be night and day all the time, like it is now.

So they made up their minds to race and see which one of them would win their wish.

So they started, and the big bear would say, "Night and day every six months! night and day every six months!" And the ant would say, "Night and day! night and day all the time!" They said the one who would say his wish the most for a week would win. The ant would jump up and down all the time and say her wish. The bear would say his wish for a while then go and eat. But the ant wouldn't go and eat, so she was getting very thin and small. The bear was afraid now, so he quit, and she won the wish.

It is said that the ant was as big as the bear till they got in this quarrel, and she grew small. It is said that the bear will always eat ants when they come across any. It is because the ant beat the bear that it is today, night and day.

Legend of the Buffalo and the Coyote

ONCE upon a time there was an old coyote who could not get anything to eat. So he went to a buffalo that was feeding on the grass nearby. Now this buffalo had magic power; he could change himself into any form he wanted to be. The coyote told him how hard it was for him to get food and he wished he could live like him so that he would not have to hunt for food and the coyote said: "I sometimes have to eat what you would not come close to." The buffalo promised he would help him if he would promise not to do the same thing to some of his kind. The coyote was very glad so he promised. The first thing the buffalo did was to dig a deep ditch with his horns then he told the coyote to stand at one end while he stood at the other end and he said to him, "I will run as hard as I can. When you see me coming do not move. When I toss you in the air as soon as you touch the ground you will be a buffalo." The coyote stood still and when he was tossed into the air he changed into a fine buffalo.

The buffalo watched him for a long time, so that he would not break his promise. But one day when they were feeding the buffalo went into a wallow and lay down. Soon he was fast asleep. While the other one was feeding there chanced to pass that way a large coyote. When the buffalo-coyote saw him, he said to him: "Don't you want to be like me? See how easily I get my food! I do not have to hunt for it." The coyote said he would like to be a buffalo, but nobody would help him. So the buffalo that once was a coyote said to him, "I will help you." So he dug a deep ditch and told the coyote to stand on the end, then he said to him: "When you see me coming toward you do not be frightened: I will not hurt you."

But the real buffalo happened to wake and he saw what was going on, but he acted like he was asleep, and he said to himself, "When you both touch the ground you will be coyotes again." They both went into the air, but when they touched the ground they were both coyotes again. The coyote was so ashamed of himself that he did not know what to do. He ran in the tall grass and hid.

(The above stories were told by the old men and women of the tribes to their children, and have been published in "Indian Legends and Superstitions," by the students of Haskell Indian Institute, Lawrence, Kansas, price 50 cents.)